

Vicarious Victimhood as Post-Holocaust Jewish Identity in Erica Fischer's Auto/Biography *Aimée and Jaguar*

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Anne Rothe,

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**Abstract:** In her article "Vicarious Victimhood as Post-Holocaust Jewish Identity in Erica Fischer's Auto/Biography *Aimée and Jaguar*" Anne Rothe reads the Austrian-Jewish journalist's interview-based dual biography in autobiographical terms. Taking recourse to such para-texts as the preface and epilogue, in which Fischer reflects on her own subject position, in addition to the auto/biographical narrative itself, Rothe critiques the notion of constructing secular Jewish identity based on the notion of vicarious or hereditary Holocaust victimhood. This provocative new reading reveals that the biography Fischer wrote constitutes a counter-narrative to the story her main collaborator, Lilly Wust, told the author about her short-lived love affair with Felice Schragenheim, who was killed in the Holocaust and whom Wust mourned for the rest of her life. Rothe furthermore argues that Fischer rewrites Wust's story to the extent of denying her core identity of vicarious Holocaust victimhood, only to claim this epistemologically and ethically untenable but culturally dominant and coveted subject position for herself.

## Anne ROTHE

### **Vicarious Victimhood as Post-Holocaust Jewish Identity in Erica Fischer's Auto/Biography *Aimée and Jaguar***

Collaboratively created by Austrian-Jewish journalist Erica Fischer and Lilly Wust, the interview-based auto/biographical narrative traces the lives and love of Lilly Wust and Felice Schragenheim, the *Aimée* and *Jaguar* of the title. The author furthermore cites from Wust's diary, Nazi documents about the Schragenheim family, the love letters and poems the two women wrote to each other, her interviews with nine witnesses to the women's lives as well as letters and notes by six further witnesses. As such, Fischer invokes the notion of documentary evidence and employs it in conjunction with the pseudo-omniscient narrative voice of traditional biography to challenge Wust's attempt of defining her identity based on a claim of vicarious Holocaust victimhood, only to define her own identity in these terms. Citing such a significant range of sources also generates the misleading impression of a postmodern cacophony of voices that reflect multiple and contradictory interpretations and thus disguises Fischer's privilege of authorial control. In other words, it serves to hide the fact that it was not the sources themselves but rather Fischer's interpretation that support her rejection of Wust's claim to vicarious Holocaust victim status, which in turn serves to support her own identity-defining claim to this subject position.

The biographical reading with regard to the author's own life history is based on an analysis of Erica Fischer, *Aimée und Jaguar. Eine Liebesgeschichte, Berlin 1943*. (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1996). This is the second edition and, unlike the first and subsequent editions, it includes both a preface and the afterword. These paratexts, in which Fischer reflects on both on her own subject position and her working relationship with Lilly Wust, are central to the argument developed here.

In the afterword, the author describes herself as "fiercely protective of the perimeter around Felice, my Jewish mother, and myself" (271) ("die Grenze zu Felice, zu meiner jüdischen Mutter und zu mir selbst hüte ich streng" [309]). She thus explicitly establishes her claim to the position of vicarious victim as the defining feature of her secular, post-Holocaust Jewish identity by creating a line of association between her own mother, who survived Holocaust persecution in England, Felice Schragenheim, who was not only persecuted but, presumably, also murdered in the Third Reich, and herself, despite the fact that she has no ties to Schragenheim beyond their Jewish identity. Wust's claim to the same subject position is based on risking her own life to protect the woman she loved from Nazi persecution and is thus established analogously to Fischer's, that is, based on close personal ties to a Jewish woman who suffered Holocaust persecution, but it also differs because, unlike Fischer, Wust cannot invoke the blood ties of kinship as shared identity markers. Moreover, while Wust accepts Fischer's identity claim, Fischer rejects Wust's account of her life and sense of self, not least because she perceives their respective claims to vicarious victim status as mutually exclusive.

After discussing the notion of vicarious victimhood and the context of American Holocaust culture in which it arose, I will analyze Fischer's and Wust's respective claims to this subject position in the auto/biographical narrative itself as well as the preface and afterword. These paratexts, to use Gerard Genette term, contain autobiographical reflections and interpretive comments by the author meant to justify her own claim to vicarious victimhood while explicitly denying Wust's claim to this subject position and creating a counter-narrative to Wust's own notion of her life story and sense of self. The genre designation as auto/biography thus not only reflects the co-constructed nature of an as-told-to biography but also the fact that the author opens and concludes it with autobiographical comments that are central to understanding her own subject position and her complex relationship with her main collaborator. My exploration of Fischer's and Wust's respective claims to vicarious victim status will also indicate that while this epistemologically and ethically untenable subject position emerged in the context of American Holocaust memory as the core marker of secular Jewish identity, *Aimée and Jaguar* indicates that it is neither limited to American-Jewish culture nor to descendants of survivors.

Prefigured by the stage and movie adaptation of Anne Frank's diary, the Holocaust entered the Western public sphere with the television broadcasts from the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. It not only introduced the notion that the genocide of European Jewry constituted a distinct and defining event in twentieth-century history but also and especially disseminated stories of extremity, ascribed significance to experiential knowledge of victimhood and suffering, and expanded the subject position of witness and the genre of testimony beyond the legal realm (Rothe 7-47). Rather than depicting the Holocaust as a complex socio-political event, the trial cast it as the sum total of the individual testimonies given in the Jerusalem court room and in front of the vast audiences of the Western

media (Wieviorka, *The Era* 71). It thus introduced the idea that the past is best understood via witness testimony, rather than historiographic and other scholarly discourse. This notion was reinforced by Elie Wiesel's rise to America's "emblematic survivor" (Young, "Parables" 17) and the "most influential interpreter of the Holocaust as sacred mystery" (Novick, *The Holocaust* 274) since the US-American publication of *Night* in 1960, whose discourse-defining media impact was rivaled only by *Schindler's List*. Transformed from a multifaceted event in European history into the inherently simplistic structure of a melodrama, where good and evil are both absolute and hence clearly distinguishable subject positions, the Holocaust would provide simple moral certainties in the increasingly complex and divided late-capitalist United States. Or as Michael Berenbaum, a former director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum put it, "people don't know what good or evil are, but they are certain about one thing: the Holocaust is absolute evil" (Wieviorka 117).

In US-American Holocaust memory, victims were increasingly ascribed the status of ultimate moral authority, based not only on their new role as historical witnesses but also on the Christian notion that physical pain purifies the soul and sanctifies the sufferer. Dominant Holocaust culture in the U.S. also altered our understanding of perpetration. Traditionally, the perpetrator designated someone who – sanctioned by socio-political and economic hegemonies – intentionally caused another to suffer by gratuitously inflicting physical pain. But as the paradigmatic shift in designation from 'Nazi victim' to 'Holocaust victim' indicates, the vast bureaucracies of modern societies have made the human agencies responsible for facilitating the political and socio-economic contexts that generate large-scale victimization impenetrable and only rarely attributable to individuals. Consequently, the perpetrator role has been generalized and tends to be attributed to abstract entities like the Holocaust. And while the notion of suffering had been transformed from an ordinary experience into a psychopathology by separating it from the body in pain and transferring suffering into the psyche long before the televised witness testimonies of Holocaust victims and Wiesel's ubiquitous media presence, U.S. Holocaust culture reinforced the logically fallacious conflation of suffering and victimhood. While all victims suffer, the reverse is not the case, that is, not everyone who suffers is a victim because a victim's suffering was caused, intentionally or accidentally, by another (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 46). In other words, unlike the discursively wider notion of suffering, the concept of victimhood requires that the subject position of its Other, the perpetrator, be occupied. And while from a strictly synchronic perspective, victim and perpetrator are mutually exclusive social roles, such as torturer and tortured or child abuser and abused child, a diachronic perspective, say, the history of Stalinist persecution in the Soviet Union or the McCarthy witch hunts of supposed communists in the U.S., illustrates that one may be simultaneously victim and perpetrator or occupy these subject positions subsequently in either order and through numerous changes. As victims can become perpetrators and vice versa, these subject positions are not absolute and binary but relative and fluctuating.

Given the ascription of moral authority to Holocaust victims, the subject position of victim became increasingly coveted. "As once the upper classes, especially the nobility, defined the good," Joseph Amato wrote, "now victims – the downtrodden, the oppressed, the humiliated – were equated with the good" (*Victims and Values* 157). Moreover, in the aftermath of the Holocaust it became widely accepted that in order to right wrongs and reestablish the equilibrium of justice, victims must be compensated for their suffering, whether through pecuniary reparation like West Germany accorded Holocaust survivors or via indirect benefits of preferential treatment as granted by the American affirmative action program, thus defining victims not only as a wronged but an owed party. And since in capitalism's market economy the inherently relative commodity value of any entity is determined by the ratio of supply and demand, establishing one's own right to the victim position and its moral capital requires denying it to others in order to keep supply low and demand high. Consequently, "once victimhood is understood to endow one with special claims and rights, the scramble to attain that designation for one's own interest group is as heated as any other race for legitimacy and power" (Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions* 85). Using a rhetoric Martha Minow termed victim talk, people increasingly "exchange testimonials of pain in a contest over who suffered more" ("Surviving" 1430) and generate what Zygmunt Bauman dubbed a "pecking order of pain" reminiscent of the rivalry among the tuberculosis patients in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* "who quickly established their own hierarchy of prestige and influence measured by the size of their pulmonary caverns" ("The Holocaust's" 35). When testimony became victim talk, it quickly spiraled into blame game cycles in which everyone seeks to out-suffer competing claims in order to assert their own preeminent position in what Peter Novick described as the "Victimization Olympics" as even "the most banal causes adopt, exploit, and thus cheapen the moral rhetoric of suffering owed" (Amato, *Victims and Values* xxiii).

Claims to the privileges of victim status established "in terms of the moral patrimony of past suffering" (Amato 18) culminated in the notion that ancestral victimhood can be inherited. And when Jewish

identity was increasingly transformed from the Judaism of religious practice into the Jewishness of an ethnically based sense of self, it not only reflected the identity politics zeitgeist of generating collective identities around experiences of victimization and suffering but it also transformed the status of righteousness ascribed to Holocaust victims into a hereditary trait of Jewish identity. Zygmunt Bauman acerbically criticized the notion of hereditary or vicarious victimhood as "basking in the fame of [one's] ancestral martyrs without paying the price of the glory" and thus "living on a borrowed identity – as martyrs by appointment, martyrs who never suffered" (34).

As Jewish identity was reconstructed around difference but secularization and intermarriage meant that religious belief and practice could no longer function as dominant identity markers and Zionism likewise lost much of its unifying pull after the occupation of Palestinian territories (Novick 6-7), the Holocaust, "looked like the one item in stock with consumer appeal" to establish a distinct Jewish identity (Novick 187). And Ian Buruma wrote equally acerbically, "when Jewishness is reduced to a taste for Woody Allen movies and bagels [...] the quasi authenticity of communal suffering will begin to look very attractive" (14). The extent to which the untenable and unethical yet culturally dominant claim of vicarious victimhood has informed post-Holocaust Jewish identity is indicated by the fact that it has even entered academic discourse. Daniel Schwarz, for example, writes in the preface to his study of Holocaust literature, aptly titled *Imagining the Holocaust*: "I dream of myself within shtetls, camps and confined circumstances, as a participant in the very world I am writing about. I awake in a cold sweat from dreams of being deported" (5-6). He continues the story of his imagined Holocaust victimhood claiming that "we see ourselves in these ghetto places, these streets. In our nightmares, we are deported and suffer the horrors of these camps" (5-6). In order to authorize his Holocaust fantasy, Schwarz thus expands his own usurpation of the victim position by ascribing it to other Jewish scholars or even American Jews at large when he attributes similar nightmare visions to an unspecified 'we.' Gary Weissman emphatically designated those who fantasize about witnessing the Holocaust as nonwitnesses and argued that they feed their self-aggrandizing horror-kitsch fantasies via the excessive consumption and/or production of Holocaust representations (20-7).

The notion of vicarious victimhood is intrinsically tied to the vast semantic extension of 'memory' and 'witnessing' generated by transforming the experience-based concepts into metaphors in order to ascribe the capacity to remember and bear witness to post-Holocaust generations. The metaphorical extension of victim and witness status not only obscures the categorical difference between those who experienced genocidal persecution and those who did not, but it also transformed the Holocaust into an origination myth that generated a new generational order and gave rise to the notion that the victims' moral righteousness can be inherited.

Particularly the designation 'second generation,' used to refer to both children of survivors and anyone Jewish of the same generation, has become dominant in post-Holocaust Jewish identity discourse despite, or rather because, of its semantic ambiguity. Moreover, in order to claim the vicarious victim position, the structurally opposite position of perpetrator must be occupied. Having been born temporarily and geographically removed from the Third Reich, the (adult) children of survivors cannot claim to be victims of genocidal persecution. And while many, maybe even most, Holocaust survivors may have suffered post-traumatic symptoms that negatively impacted their relationships with their children, casting them in the perpetrator role to claim vicarious victimhood would be ethically unacceptable, given the status of ultimate moral authority ascribed to survivors, and epistemologically unsound as the parents' victim status is a requirement for claims to hereditary victimhood. As a result, perpetrator status is ascribed to the abstract entity of the Holocaust, thus essentially anthropomorphizing it, indicated most prominently by the title of Helen Epstein's famous collection of interview-based narratives, *Children of the Holocaust*.

Whether exhibited by immediate descendants of Holocaust victims or by those whose only tie to the genocide is their Jewishness, the notion of vicarious victimhood constitutes "a hereditary claim to sympathy and to the ethical indulgence owed to those who suffer," Zygmunt Bauman writes, and thus "a signed-in-advance and *in blanco* certificate of moral righteousness" (Bauman 36). Alain Finkielkraut similarly argues that claiming vicarious victim status means giving in to "the pleasurable temptation of claiming the victim's exemplary prestige as one's own" (32) and that an ethically responsible Holocaust memory requires "before all else, this negative gesture: to not appropriate the difference" (31). A less acerbic critic than Bauman and Finkielkraut may argue that the claim for the privileged subject position of victim and witness expresses the wish that an authentic memory of the Holocaust, that is, the historical witnesses' primary memory, could be maintained forever, especially as a defense against so-called Holocaust revisionists. This wish, however understandable, is obviously impossible to fulfill since the subject position of historical witness, who experienced the crimes first-hand and can therefore pass the knowledge on as communicative memory, to use Maurice Halbwachs' concept, can by

definition not be transferred to anyone else. The Holocaust memory that can be passed on to subsequent generations is by necessity what can be designated, following Jan Assmann, as a mediated cultural memory.

In claiming vicarious victimhood by establishing a line of identification between herself, her mother, and Felice Schragenheim, Fischer is precisely appropriating the categorical difference between those who were persecuted in the Holocaust and those who did not experience genocidal persecution in order to speak from the position of moral righteousness ascribed to victims. While the title would indicate a dual biography, Felice Schragenheim is the focus of Fischer's narrative with Lilly Wust largely functioning as the primary witness to Schragenheim's life. The discrepancy in focus is most apparent in the vast difference in the respective length of the third chapter, which chronicles the life of Schragenheim and her family up to the point of meeting Wust and (in the German edition) encompasses 62 pages, and chapter twelve, which narrates Wust's life from the late 1940s through the present and consists of only eight pages. And while the designation of Lilly Wust as *Hauptperson* in the list of people Fischer thanks on the first page of the book, that is, in one of the paratexts that surround the auto/biographical account and also include the preface and afterword, seems to indicate that she is the main character, the term is better understood in this context as designating her main collaborator (Fischer ix/11; first page numbers refer to the English translation, second ones to the German original).

Moreover, Fischer explicitly states in the preface, that is, in a paratext that provides significant information to readers with the intention of impacting their reception, that as a Jewish woman she is approaching the story from Jaguar's side, in other words, that her focus and empathy are with Felice Schragenheim, to whom she also dedicated the book (Fischer 14; the preface is not included in the English translation). The author furthermore mentions in the preface that she not only organized an exhibition about Schragenheim but that her reason for doing so was "to prevent the dead Felice Schragenheim being entirely overshadowed by the living lover" ("um zu verhindern, dass die tote Felice Schragenheim vollkommen von der lebenden Geliebten überschattet wird," [Fischer [15], my trans.]). She thus perceived the media attention Wust received as a Righteous Gentile and a Lesbian after the publication of the auto/biography's first edition as eclipsing Schragenheim's story of Holocaust persecution. And the exhibition was meant to refocus the story of Aimee and Jaguar from Schragenheim functioning as a supporting character in Wust's story of Holocaust rescue and coming out to the auto/biographical account Fischer had created, in which Wust functioned as the primary witness to Schragenheim's story of Holocaust victimhood. While Fischer seems to imply that the former constitutes an appropriation of Schragenheim's story, given that her own identity is grounded in her identification with Schragenheim's victimhood, the latter is no less appropriative. In fact, Fischer's identification with Schragenheim is so central to her identity that the media focus on Wust's story had threatened her sense of self and hence it needed to be rectified. It was thus not only Schragenheim's story itself she felt had been eclipsed but her own sense of vicarious victimhood.

In order to ground her claim to vicarious Holocaust victimhood in Schragenheim's story, Fischer needs to establish a connection with her that would justify her hereditary claim to this subject position. Moreover, as she rejects Wust's claim to vicarious victimhood, she needs to generate an association with Schragenheim that trumps Wust's to establish that she, rather than Wust, is the legitimate heir to Schragenheim's victim status. While Wust loved and protected her from persecution at the risk of her own life, Fischer invokes kinship relations and thus blood ties based on her shared Jewishness by recourse to the above-mentioned line of identification between Schragenheim, Fischer's mother and herself: "Jealous of my little slice of identity, I am fiercely protective of the perimeter around Felice, my Jewish mother, and myself" (271) ("Die Grenze zu Felice, zu meiner jüdischen Mutter und zu mir selbst hüte ich streng, eifersüchtig auf mein kleines Stückchen Identität" [309]). She repeats this line of identification – Felice, my mother and I – when she continues: "In contrast, I feel closer to Felice. Though she is dead, I know Felice well. I am familiar with her family and her childhood from my mother's stories about her own childhood and youth in Warsaw" (271) ("Felice hingegen ist mir näher. Felice, die Tote, ist mir vertraut. Ihre Familie und ihre Kindheit kenne ich von Erzählungen meiner Mutter über ihre eigene Kindheit und Jugend in Warschau" [309-10]). However, another paratext, Fischer's autobiographical narrative "The Silence" ("Das Schweigen"), in which she expands on the remarks about her own family story and subject position she made in the preface and afterword, entirely contradicts this claim: "My mother purported not to know any Jewish traditions. And her childhood and youth in Warsaw seemed to have been obliterated without a trace" ("Jüdische Traditionen gab meine Mutter vor nicht zu kennen. Ihre Kindheit und Jugend in Warschau schien spurlos gelöscht" [*Die Liebe* [242] my trans.]).

In her own memory, Fischer seems to have substituted Schragenheim's story for the memories her mother maintained she did not have and the stories she did not tell. But in order to establish her claim of a kinship relationship with her based on their shared Jewish ancestry, Fischer not only has to invoke and instrumentalize her own mother, she also has to efface her Gentile father. Although he left Austria for British exile to escape the draft and join her mother, in Fischer's dichotomous world, in which even a righteous Gentile like Wust is turned into a follower and perpetrator, a non-Jewish father would lessen her kinship association with Felice Schragenheim and thus her claim to vicarious victimhood. As she put it bluntly in "The Silence," "I wasn't interested in the non-Jewish part of my family. I identified with the victims" ("Der nicht-jüdische Teil meiner Familie interessierte mich nicht. Ich identifizierte mich mit den Opfern" [244] my trans). And although she has no actual familial ties to Schragenheim, she not only comes to think of her story as a substitute for her mother's but she begins to identify with Schragenheim herself when she writes in the afterword: "It is a lost world that I long for, even though I know that I wouldn't have been able to tolerate its rigidity any more than Felice did. I'm also familiar with Felice's arrogance and her longing for security, which is always also tied to the desire to leave" (271) ("Eine verlorene Welt, nach der ich mich sehne, auch wenn ich weiß, daß ich ihre Enge ebensowenig ertragen hätte wie Felice. Vertraut ist mir auch Felices Arroganz und ihre Sehnsucht nach Geborgenheit, die stets auch ein Wunsch nach Fortgehen ist" [309-10] my trans).

In her fantasies of identification, Fischer thus even presumes to know Schragenheim's thoughts and ideas, longings and fears. While believing she knows the mind of a woman she never met decades after her death would indicate some degree of identity confusion, feigning such knowledge in the auto/biographical narrative constitutes a rhetorical strategy to simulate the omniscient third-person narrator of realist fiction in order to establish her counter-narrative, in which she, rather than Lilly Wust, is the legitimate heir of Schragenheim's Holocaust victimhood, as unquestionable truth. As fictional third-person narrators are disembodied entities and therefore cannot be ascribed human features like fallibility and bias, the fictional universe they create constitutes the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Although biographies are third-person narratives and traditional biographers employ the omniscient narrative mode of realist novels, biographers share the human characteristics of first-person narrators and the omniscience is thus simulated. Fischer mimics narrative omniscience to claim an objective stance toward the depicted world and to ascribe the status of absolute truth to her counter-narrative.

She simulates omniscience with regard to the thoughts and feeling of Felice Schragenheim not only in the afterword but throughout the auto/biographical narrative. Fischer writes, for example, "to compensate for the obstacles confronting her in life, she has a series of constantly changing love affairs" (73) ("mit häufig wechselnden Liebesaffären kompensiert sie ihre blockierten Lebensperspektiven" [97]). While new lovers also meant expanding a network of people who would hide and protect her for a while and may well have been a necessity for survival, what is relevant here is that Fischer cannot know the motivation for Schragenheim's changing liaisons with the absolute certainty of an omniscient narrator because, unlike the latter, biographers cannot read their characters' minds. She does admit in the afterword that while "Felice left an abundance of letters, poems, notes and other documents [...], I can only intuit her feelings and thoughts" (272) ("Felice hat eine Fülle von Briefen, Zeugnissen, Bescheinigungen und Gedichten hinterlassen [...] Felices Gefühle und Gedanken kann ich aber nur erahnen" [310]). Yet, in the auto/biographical narrative itself, she simulates omniscient knowledge of those feelings and thoughts rather than characterizing them as conjecture based on intuition.

The author furthermore mimics the role of a fictional third-person narrator by referring to the figures of the story by their first rather than their full and/or last name, as biographers tend to do. She even takes the imitation of fictional omniscient narration as far as simulating dialogue among characters. However, direct speech violates the autobiographical pact because not only was the author not present during the conversations but it is also impossible for those who were to remember them verbatim. Moreover, Fischer includes arbitrary – in the sense that it is irrelevant to Schragenheim's and Wust's lives – statistical and other factual information about the Holocaust without referencing her sources in the text, thus covertly claiming omniscient knowledge of Holocaust history. She writes, for example, "in April 1944, hundreds of thousands of Greek and Hungarian Jews are being deported to Auschwitz. Of the 400,000 Hungarian Jews, 250,000 are sent to the gas chambers within eight weeks" (159) ("Im April 1944 werden griechische und ungarische Juden zu Hunderttausenden nach Auschwitz deportiert. Von den 400.000 ungarischen Juden werden in acht Wochen 250.000 Menschen vergast" [188] my trans). While she does provide a bibliography, Fischer does not reference any of the sources in the narrative.

Fischer also effaces the three-year-long research and writing process from the narrative in order to obfuscate the biographer's inherently limited knowledge and subjective interpretation, which in her

case is, moreover, significantly impacted by her own subject position. She thus hides the fact that by interviewing Wust and nine other witnesses, she not only co-created these witness accounts but also that she transformed them into a seamless narrative, eliminating idiosyncrasies and contradictions and effacing references to particular witness testimony as the source of a particular fact or interpretation. The latter is particularly problematic because at least one of the nine witnesses is most likely biased because Felice Schragenheim ended their relationship when she met Lilly Wust. Fischer employs these rhetorical devices, then, to simulate the omniscience and omnipotence of a fictional third-person narrator in order to authorize her auto/biographical narrative as unquestionable truth by implicitly declaring alternative emplotments to be epistemologically impossible.

Simulating fictional third-person narration also allows Fischer to silence Wust's own voice and radically rewrite the account she gave in her diary, her scrapbook of letters, poems and photographs, as well as her interviews with the author. In selecting and re-contextualizing quotes from these the primary sources she quotes, Fischer employs them to create a counter-narrative to Wust's own account. And while she writes in the afterword that Wust will disagree with some of her interpretations, she vastly understates the extent to which her auto/biographical narrative contradicts Wust's own sense of her life and self. As she neither indicates their differences of interpretation nor includes Wust's own version of events in the auto/biographical narrative, engaging in such low-level self-criticism serves to preempt substantial criticism of her counter-narrative, thereby reinforcing rather than relativizing its truth claims. Moreover, Fischer's description of her interviews with Wust in the preface as wrenching memories from her past not only describes how difficult and painful it was for the latter to remember but also inadvertently captures the notion of appropriation, theft, and struggle as the verb *entreißen* she uses designates snatching or seizing a valuable object (Fischer 10). However, the fact that Fischer cites Wust saying that "now it's not my story anymore" ("jetzt ist es nicht mehr meine Geschichte") which "at times upsets me" (159) ("manchmal bin ich traurig" [306]) indicates that the author was both aware of her usurpation of Wust's life story and that she felt justified to do so. Ironically, this interpretation is supported by the fact that in the afterword Fischer accuses an unnamed American journalist writing a book about so-called Righteous Gentiles, who saved Jews from persecution in Germany, that he *entreibt*, that is, snatches or wrenches, Wust's story from her to appropriate it for his own narrative (Fischer 267/306)

Fischer silences Wust's own voice in order to create a counter-narrative that denies her main collaborator vicarious victim status and ascribes it to herself. She implicitly rejects Wust's core identity of hereditary victimhood indirectly by claiming in the afterword that Schragenheim would have ended the relationship had she survived (Fischer 271/310), despite strong evidence to the contrary. Schragenheim and Wust wrote wedding vows and signed an unofficial marriage contract. Schragenheim's vows list ten promises, the first and the last two repeat verbatim "I will always love you" ("Ich werde dich immer lieben") while the second promise states "I will never leave you" (123) ("Ich werde dich nie allein lassen" [151]). While assuring Wust of her eternal love assured her own continued protection from genocidal persecution, there is no evidence that, had she survived, Schragenheim would have left Wust. Moreover, Fischer explicitly rejects Wust's claim to vicarious victimhood in the afterword when she emphatically asserts "I do not permit her to claim victim status" (271) ("Ich erlaube ihr nicht, den Opferstatus für sich zu beanspruchen" [309]), thus also ascribing the right and power to define who is a victim, vicarious or otherwise, to herself.

But the author not only denies Wust victim status but in the preface redefines her as a Nazi follower and even as a perpetrator, despite the fact that she protected four Jewish women from genocidal persecution, three of whom survived. According to Fischer "the Jewish survivors and Felice's girl friends are unable and unwilling to make peace with Lilly Wust, the one-time Nazi follower. They do not give her a chance to atone for her complicity in perpetrating Nazi crimes." ("Die jüdischen Überlebenden und Felices Freundinnen können und wollen keinen Frieden schließen mit Lilly Wust, der Nazi-Mitläuferin von damals. Sie geben ihr keine Chance, ihre Mittäterschaft wiedergutzumachen" [15] my trans). The statement, for which she provides no evidence, is apparently the author's summary of the shared opinion among those of Schragenheim's friends she interviewed, all but one of whom are Jewish and thus Holocaust survivors. While the syntactically awkward distinction between "Jewish survivors" and "Felice's girl friends" would thus be redundant, as Fischer cannot empirically substantiate these scathing and self-serving accusations, she seeks to lend them credibility by ascribing them not only to Schragenheim's Jewish girl friends but implicitly to Holocaust survivors at large.

Moreover, in seeking to create a negative foil against which she can establish her own identity of vicarious victimhood, Fischer vastly expands those to whom she ascribes the status of the Nazi Other when she writes: "As a Jewish woman, I approach the story from Jaguar's side and I can't be as lenient as many young women who refuse to even consider Aimée's possible complicity" ("Ich, die ich



mich als Jüdin der Geschichte von Jaguars Seite her nähere, kann nicht so nachsichtig sein wie viele junge Frauen, die sich dagegen sperren, auch nur über eine mögliche Mitschuld von Aimée nachzudenken" [14]) my trans). Both the reiterated accusation of Wust's supposed complicity and the group of women Fischer accuses of refusing to even consider it remain vague and empirically unsubstantiated. However, stressing her own Jewish identity, the attributes of 'German' and 'Gentile' are clearly implied in the designation of the group of women to whom the status of the Other is thus expanded, despite Fischer's self-proclaimed feminism. Fischer voices all of these accusations in the preface, which indicates that she seeks to reinforce the reception of her account as a counter-narrative to Wust's own story of vicarious victimhood. Moreover, by not corroborating the claims in the preface, she implies that the auto/biographical narrative will provide the evidence, a rhetorical strategy that further impacts the reception in favor of her agenda.

Fischer also seeks to ascribe the status of the Other to Wust in the narrative itself by employing the stereotype of the adulterous and greedy Shiksa, accusing Wust of Anti-Semitism, and even blaming her for Schragenheim's deportation from Theresienstadt. However, the only empirical evidence she provides for these scathing accusations are statements made by two former lovers of Schragenheim, Elenai Pollak and Inge Wolf, the latter of whom she left when she met Lilly Wust. Wolf claims to remember after more than five decades that Wust made an anti-Semitic remark on two occasions and, evoking the figure of the adulterous Shiksa, that not only did she have affairs with several of her husbands colleagues but that she preferred long-term Nazis (Fischer 6/24). And despite the fact that Wust used the food stamps she received for herself and her children to feed the four women she hid, Elenai Pollack accused her of seeking to enrich herself by stealing Schragenheim's few possessions, particularly a fur coat, thus merging the stereotype of the greedy Shiksa with the figure of the so-called *Aufbewarier*, German Gentiles who promised to safe-keep Jewish property but often refused to return it. Pollack expanded her accusations of Wust to all Germans and even claimed that almost everyone of them not only engaged in theft of Jewish property but even denounced people in order to satisfy their greed (Fischer 190-1/222-3). Fischer takes these accusations at face value, despite the fact that the latter is not only contradicted by Wust's decision to protect four Jewish women from persecution and share her home and food with them but that none of the vast number of documents the author amassed provided any evidence that would substantiate them.

Moreover, in her self-serving attempts to cast Wust as a follower and even perpetrator, Fischer stresses Wust's long, red hair to evoke an association her with "her look-alike, the notorious Jewish informer Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn [...] whose collaboration with the Gestapo resulted in the arrests of hundreds of Jews" (Sieg 308). And she even suggests that Wust's trip to Theresienstadt to see Schragenheim may be in part responsible for her deportation and thus for her death. Yet again relying on unnamed sources but at the same time authorizing the accusation by designating them as Wust's own friends, Fischer writes: "When Lilly's friends find out about her Gestapo summons, they feel vindicated that her Theresienstadt escapade was pure madness and maybe even contributed to Felice's deportation East" (Fischer 220) ("Als Lillys Freunde von der Gestapo-Vorladung erfahren, fühlen sie sich bestätigt, daß Lillys Theresienstädter Abenteuer purer Wahnsinn war, ja vielleicht sogar mit Schuld hatte an Felices Deportation in den Osten" [Fischer [254] my trans). Fischer thus employs pure conjecture by unidentified sources that are moreover unspecified with regard to their documentary status and were thus most likely co-generated by Fischer in interviews, to reconstruct Wust's act of courageous defiance as an act of contributory fault in Schragenheim's murder. In order to do so, she not only relies on speculation but effaces the obvious analogy between Wust's defiance of the status quo to the famous Rosenstraße protest, when German women successfully demanded the release of their Jewish husbands, children, and other loved ones from Rosenstraße prison in Berlin at great personal danger.

The only fact that can be empirically substantiated by something other than conjecture and speculation of anonymous and/or biased witnesses presumably co-generated by Fischer in her interviews with them, is that Wust's husband was a member of the Nazi party. However, claiming that Wust must have shared her husband's Nazi ideology is not only contradicted by her actions of protecting four Jewish women from persecution but such an argument relies on the notion of guilt by association which, while widely used in dictatorships, is contrary to the democratic notion of innocent until proven guilty. In seeking to not only deny Wust vicarious victim status but even turn her into the negative foil of the Nazi Other against which Fischer seeks to establish her own claim to the coveted subject position of vicarious victimhood, her counter-narrative inadvertently confirms Zygmunt Bauman's (36/7) argument that when Jewish identity is primarily or even solely based on hereditary claims to the victim position, "the others, the non-Jews, emerge as one-dimensional as the Jews appear in the vision of their haters."

Reflecting the epistemologically fallacious but culturally dominant ideas of conflating suffering with victimhood and extending Holocaust victimhood metaphorically, Lilly Wust came to think of herself as a vicarious victim because the woman she loved was a Holocaust victim and she herself suffered as a consequence. The Nazis were the Others against whom she would define herself and, conflating Germans and Nazis, she came to resent everything German, stating in one of her interviews with the author that "even today, nobody did anything! [...] I still hate the Germans. Again and again something new surfaces" (265-6) ("Es will auch heute keiner gewesen sein! [...] Ich hasse die Deutschen immer noch. Immer wieder kommt irgendetwas zum Vorschein" [303-4] my trans).

And Fischer furthermore cites one of Wust's sons saying: "At home [...] we were brought up to think that everything German is bad. In this sense, we really had an anti-German upbringing. My mother was constantly cursing the damn Nazis, and all Germans were Nazis" (259) ("Zu Hause wurden wir [...] so erzogen, daß alles Deutsche schlecht ist. In dem Sinne haben wir wirklich eine antideutsche Erziehung genossen. Meine Mutter fluchte andauernd über die verdammten Nazis, und alle Deutschen wären Nazis" [298] my trans).

Moreover, having also internalized the culturally dominant notion that Jewish identity is grounded in vicarious Holocaust victimhood, she came to think of herself as what may be described as vicariously Jewish. In other words, rather than claiming vicarious victim status based on her Jewish identity like Fischer, Wust embraced Jewishness because she conflated it with vicarious Holocaust victimhood. She takes her post-Holocaust Philo-Semitism as far as claiming to be Jewish, participating in the Jewish community, observing some Jewish customs, and registering her sons as Jewish at school. Fischer wonders why she neither requited the affection of her part-time lodger nor became active in the Lesbian movement. Blinded by her own need for a victim identity, she does not recognize that Wust came to define her core self based on vicarious Holocaust victimhood and/as vicarious Jewishness rather than on lesbian minority counter-culture, which lacked the privilege and moral capital of the former, and that maintaining this identity required her life-long mourning and suffering. But despite the reversal of causality, Wust constructs her identity within the binary universe of dominant Holocaust memory, in which an increasingly de-historicized Nazi figure discursively functions as the evil Other to a Holocaust victim cast in the dominant religious imagery of Western culture as embodying the sanctity of persecuted innocence.

It was precisely this de-historicization that led both Fischer and Wust to create an origination myth for their own suffering in the Holocaust and to ground their identity in an epistemologically and ethically untenable claim to hereditary victim status. While Wust perceives Fischer as occupying the same subject position, the author not only rejects her "matter-of-fact assumption of closeness to Jews" (Fischer 271) ("die Anmaßung einer selbstverständlichen Nähe zu den Juden" [Fischer 309]) and denies her claim to vicarious victim status but she even ascribes her the subject positions of Nazi Other (Fischer 15). Having read countless survivor memories "with morbid fascination" (273) ("mit einer morbiden Faszination," [311]) as she admits in the afterword, she vehemently rejects Wust's identity as it infringes upon her own, exclusive claim to this subject position and turns her into the Nazi Other against whom she can define herself as a vicarious Holocaust victim. Fischer's emphatic rejection of Wust's identity claim evokes the outraged critique of Silvia Plath's metaphorical use of Holocaust victims to describe her own suffering as effacing or at least domesticating and thus minimizing genocidal persecution. According to Gary Weissman, Plath's Holocaust tropes were so harshly rejected because the critics objected to "a non-Jew imaginatively applying to herself symbols of collective Jewish suffering" (119, 204). However, it is not only Plath but precisely all of us "who remember only by fiat of imagination," whether Jews or Gentiles, who must refrain from putting on "this death-rig," as Georg Steiner wrote (305). Or, as Alan Finkielkraut put it, an ethically responsible memory of the Holocaust means to not appropriate the difference between those who experienced genocidal persecution and those who did not (31).

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